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The institution distinctive of the autochthonous communities is the office of 'Custodian of the Earth'. This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connexion with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of the autochthonous communities.

The ethnographic picture of to-day suggests that the population of the Voltaic region was, in the past, constantly being redistributed by migrations of small groups. In the absence of written records that is all we can say. The fact that such migrations have gone on in the recent past, and are still going on in the central area, suggests that these migrations were (as they are) the result rather of ecological pressures and social forces than of large-scale conquests. But marauding slave-raiders may have been a cause of migrations in some areas. Two of the most notorious, Samory and Babatu, were spreading devastation in the north-western parts of the region at the time when the French and the British were partitioning the country during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Physically, culturally, in their economic organization, and their social and political structure, the people of Taleland are typical in every respect of the tribes of the central Volta region.

General Characteristics of the Tallensi

The people of the central Volta region are of negroid stock. They are not a notably fine physical type, but the best of them are attractive physical specimens, as may be seen from the photographs in this book. Head measurements of thirteen Tale men gave an average C.I. of 74·7. The predominant head type appears to be dolichocephalic. In skin colour they vary from black through chocolate brown to bronze, which the natives call 'red' (*bon-ze'e*) and regard as the most attractive bodily hue. Their hair is of the usual negroid peppercorn type. They have also the typical negroid nasal and lip forms, but the very broad, flat nose and markedly everted lips are not so common as in the tropical forest belt. Both men and women are of medium stature, the men being slightly the taller. Anybody over 5 ft. 7 or 8 in. is considered tall. Though they are mostly slight in build, all the somatic types with which we are familiar may be seen among these people: the stocky pyknic, the slim asthenic, the stalwart athletic, to use Kretschmer's terminology, are all common. Fat men or women, however, are very rare. Climatic conditions, density of population, and a primitive agricultural technique[1] all conspire to keep the average standard of nutrition low. In the best seasons the natives grow only enough cereals for their needs.[2] Their animal husbandry provides little surplus to exchange for cereals, and they have no crafts worth speaking of. The labour they supply to richer parts of the Gold Coast contributes very little return by way of foodstuffs to the home community. Like most subsistence farmers in Africa, their diet is notably deficient in animal protein.

[1] *Vide* Lynn, C. W., op. cit.

[2] This aspect of Tale economics is more fully discussed in Lynn, op. cit., and in Fortes, M. and S. L., loc. cit.

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continue through Sie-Tɛndaaŋ or Namɔyalug to Gban, Gar, and Kpatia or to Buug, Duusi, Datɔk, and beyond to Pieluŋ and Nangodi with scarcely a break in the continuity of settlement.

In addition to these two main blocks of settlements—let us call them, for convenience, the Tongo district and the Sie district—there are scattered Tale settlements, separated from them and from one another by stretches of bush, between them and the Volta rivers—Namooraana, Diga'ar, Tola, Kumbude, Biuŋ, and Gbiug-on-the-river being the most important. But other settlements on the frontiers of Taleland, the inhabitants of which are not recognized as Tallensi by outsiders, also fall into the framework of their political geography.

The first puzzle a stranger must unravel, if he hopes to understand the life of our people, is the apparent contradiction between the density of residential aggregation and the cleavages underlying their social relations. He will meet it latent in simple and casual occurrences, or conspicuously overt in organized collective events such as the communal hunting and fish drives, the Great Festivals, or other ceremonial gatherings.

Taleland is thickly populated. The Tongo district alone has a population of over 12,000 according to the 1931 census. This area of ancient habitation—*tɛŋ kɔrɔg*, an old country, as the natives describe it—has supported a sedentary population for a period which cannot be less than several centuries. Sacrifices are made on graves of ancestors said to have lived ten or eleven generations ago. No one familiar with the people would doubt the authenticity of these graves; but the three centuries or so of settlement this implies must, I believe, be considered a minimum period. Centuries of intermarriage have woven a web of kinship which embraces the whole country. The patterns of institutions and ideas are uniform throughout Taleland. Yet a fundamental dogma of their collective life is that of local and sectional particularism, and of divergence within the common patterns.

The 'Real Talis'

Neither the Tongo people, nor those living in the Sie district, are considered to be real Talis; the 'real Talis' are the folk who live on and around the Tong Hills. The Great Festivals are usually cited as a decisive criterion of classification. The 'real Talis' (*Talis mɛŋa*), a Tɛnzugu elder once stated, are in the following places: Tɛnzugu, Santɛŋ, Yinduur, Sii, Gorogo, Wakii, Gbeog, and Soog, as well as the small settlements near Santɛŋ and the offshoots of Wakii at Gbambee and Woo. '*Tam tɔmɔra Talis tuntuoma, ti Gɔlib ni ti Bɔyaraam*—We perform the works of Talis, our *Gɔlib* and *Bɔyaraam* festivals.' Tongo and Zoo, Yamɔlag and Sie, are Namoos, he continued; and Zubiuŋ and Sɔk, Ba'ari and Yayazuor, belong more closely to the Namoos than to the Talis. '*Bam tɔmɔra namoorɔt*—They celebrate (lit. work) after the Namoo fashion, the *Gingaaŋ* and *Da'a* festivals.' There remain Sawalag, Sie-Tɛndaaŋ, Duusi, and the settlements close to them. '*Bam lɛbɔra Namnam sani*—They fall in with the Namnam' (whose chief festival is called *Tɛyɔn-lɛbɔgɔt*.)[1]

[1] A brief account of one aspect of these festivals is given in my paper 'Ritual

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	Approximate Period.	Explanation.
2. Gunfuku	February	Gun[a], gunga—kapok tree. fuku—blowing of the wind. The period when the kapok pods ripen. This is evidence of the Dagomba extraction of this people, since kapok is, undoubtedly, a southern production. Their own tradition says they came from the south as a result of interfamily wars.
3. Gologu	March	This is the name of a festival which takes place shortly after full moon. In 1921 the ceremonial dancing and symbolic planting of corn, which I witnessed by good luck, took place on March 1st. In 1922 about March 13th.
4. Sionbeo	End of March or early April	Time of early planting. Sion—making holes in which to drop the grains. beo—poor. At this time it is not certain if the dry season will not return for a period and so dry up the first shoots.
5. Sionsongo	April and May	The time of good planting. songo—good. This is the proper planting time.
6. Sionyio	Late May and early June	The time of late planting. yio—conveys an idea of doubt. Planting at this time may or may not have a result.
7. Narechag	Late June and early July	Early millet harvest. Nare—early millet. chag'—cut.
8. Naliri	Late July, mid August	Na'—early millet. biri—small. The time for eating the small ears of early millet, which are not put in the granary owing to their smallness.
9. Komwanreg	August-September	Kom—water. wanreg'—month or moon. The period of heavy rain.